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THE TALE OF THE KING'S DAUGHTER IN THE BESIEGED TOWN.

BY ALBRECHT WIRTH.

Shapur de Sassanide once laid siege to a stronghold of the northern Arabs in Hatra. This inaccessible eyrie in the desert of Hauran was renowned for its beautiful temple of the sun. Two Roman emperors, Trajan and Septimus Severus, had suffered a terrible defeat in a vain attack on its towering walls. It seemed as though the gallant Persian was to meet with no better fortune; however, it came to pass that one evening while riding on horseback toward the walls to scout, he was seen by the fair Nadira, the daughter of the king. She was well pleased with the handsome warrior. She took an arrow and attached to it a letter containing these words: "Your beauty has conquered my heart. If you will promise to marry me I will open to you the gates of the town." She shot the arrow to the very place where Shapur stood. The king read the message and sent his answer in the affirmative by means of the same arrow. The town is eventually taken. Nadira's father, Daijanas, is killed and the fair maiden becomes the bride of Shapur. The next morning she complains bitterly that she slept so very badly because she was pressed by a rose-leaf.*

"Oh, you tender dove," asks her Sassanide, "say, how did you live when your father held sway over Hatra?"

"Oh, I lay upon eiderdown and I fed upon wine and marrow and sweet honey."

"And you could betray a father so kind as this? Ho, guards! seize the faithless lady and bring hither a wild horse to trample her."

This is the relation of Tabari, Mirkhond, and other writers. Nöldeke, the German orientalist, thinks Tabari's source is the Greek tale of Nisus and Skylla. Nisus was king of Nisaia, in the country of Megaris, and he was besieged by Minos. Skylla,

* No doubt from a similar tale is derived Andersen's "Princess and the Pea."

the daughter of the said king, fell in love with Minos, and was induced to steal upon her sleeping father and pull out his golden or, as others say, his purple hair, upon which his life depended. Nisus was assassinated and his city conquered. According to Higni (*Fables*, 242), he made way with himself. Now Minos was disgusted with Skylla's treason and would not take her with him. He threw her into the sea. According to some authors, she followed her beloved into the waves and took hold of his ship, but sinking down, she was changed into an animal. As a third set of writers has it, she was persecuted by her father and was changed into a sea-eagle. As to the opinion of Nöldeke concerning a Greek origin of the Persian tale, there is the objection that the tale of the affectionate king's daughter in the besieged city is also to be found in countries untouched by Greek influences. Thirty years ago there appeared the autobiography of an English adventurer, John Campbell. His father, a British officer, had been killed in the unfortunate expedition against Afghanistan in the forties, when the whole British army was wiped out in a mountain pass. The victorious Afghans had found the officer's child and had given him to a chief to bring up. When twelve years of age the boy escaped and wandered throughout the vast regions of Central Asia with varying adventures, until finally in India he came again to his father's people. On one occasion during his wanderings he heard the following narrative: A long time ago the Emperor of China besieged Dschealledin in the city of Gulguleh (near Bochara), whose name signifies confusion. The attempt was for a long time unavailing. At last the daughter of the besieged sultan noticed the emperor in all the magnificence of his armor riding toward the walls, and lost her heart to him. She wrapped a letter around an arrow and shot it toward the emperor's tent. The letter said: "Great and beautiful prince, if you promise me that I shall be your bride I will disclose to you a plan by which this city may be brought into your power." On the promise of the emperor she advised him to drain the river which supplied the city with its drinking water. The Chinese did this, and attacked and destroyed the citizens, reduced as they were to extremity by thirst. On their return toward China the princess complained of the fatigue of riding on horseback, for which she was too delicate, as she had passed her whole life on silk and down. The conqueror

commanded that the weakling should be crushed between two millstones, "for," said he, "a daughter who has betrayed her father will also be a treacherous wife."

A similar motive is found also in the story of Moses as taken from Jewish sources by the Hellenist Aristobulus, and after him by Syrian and Byzantine writers. By command of Pharaoh, Moses conducts a war against the Ethiops and besieges for ten years the city of Saba, which is protected on one side by the Nile, on the other by a desert infested by serpents, on the third by a huge wall, and on the fourth by a numerous host of defenders. Moses procures an immense number of storks to exterminate the serpents, and then marches against this side of the city, which is now unprotected. And now it might be expected that he would take the city by force, but Adonia, the Queen of Ethiopia, fell in love with the approaching commander and agreed to betray the city to him on condition that he should marry her. Moses fulfills his promise to marry the queen, but has no further communication with her. The queen is angered and they separate.

Somewhat similar is the Norwegian tale of which Madame Flygaré-Carlén availed herself in the "Maiden's Tower." When Waldemar Atterdag, the famous conqueror of the thirteenth century, laid siege to Tromsø he is said to have made his way in disguise into the city as a spy, a feat which appears in many sagas. The emperor's daughter promised him that she would open the gates of the town in the night on condition that he should spare her father's house. It so happened the city was taken, but the triumphant Waldemar leaves the maiden behind him. After the withdrawal of the enemy her father was obliged by the citizens to pass sentence upon his own child and to wall her up alive.

I shall in the following remarks try to give an explanation of those sagas. The fair, youthful hero is the sun. The castle to which he lays siege is the unconquerable castle of the clouds; the daughter of the lord of the castle is the lightning; the maiden enamored of the conqueror expresses her longing by arrows and is answered by arrows. She destroys her own father's town just as the lightning shatters the cloud from which it took its origin. As soon as the waters of the sky have vanished the Sun God wins and sweeps away on his steeds. But what becomes of

the liberated maid to whom he swore fidelity? She was lying softly and tenderly on the eiderdown of the cloud, feeding on its marrow and drinking the heavenly nectar. She cannot stand the riding on fiery horses; she pulls out the purple and gold hairs of her father,* *i. e.*, the cloud brings no danger without the lightning. The tender maiden, the arrow-shooting virgin, is crushed by the sun, the fiery mill (Kuhn, *Descent of Fire*, p. 115), or she is trampled by fiery horses. The tempest slowly sinking into the ocean, as if appealing to the sea-girt Greeks, its child, the lightning, is drowned in the flood, as the dark storm-cloud passing over is buried in the gloomy night.

II.

In one version Nadira's father is called Satrana. Now, this was also the name of the lord of the miraculous castle of Chavarnac, which was reputed to have been built near Hatra. According to Mirkhond, the castle was made of black stones. Sinimar, who erected it, declared, however, that if his wages had been more liberal he would by his magic craft have built a castle that would have turned according to the sun, and would have appeared in red color in the morning, in white at midday, and in yellow in the evening. Now, there was a hidden stone in that castle. If this stone were taken away, the whole building would fall. In order that this secret should never be revealed, the king of Hatra caused the poor architect to be thrown down from the top of the wondrous castle.

The architect is the sun. If he draws water, there appears a black castle made of the vapors of the clouds. The castle is adorned with different colors, according to the position of the sun. The architect is dragged down from the top—*i. e.*, the sun is hidden by the covering of the clouds or he disappears entirely behind the horizon.

III.

Sevechorus the Chaldean, by the advice of his sorcerers, causes his daughter to be imprisoned in a tower, for it had been prophesied to him that he must guard himself from a son that might be

* The golden hairs of the king are found again in the three golden hairs of the devil in Grimm's Children's Tales.

born to her. The maiden has a son by an invisible being. The son is carried down to the earth from the top of the tower by an eagle. The descendant of kings wanders through the world and holds sway later on over Babylon. Again there is a wedding of the Sun God, and there is, if not the original, at least the characteristic type of the tale of Danæ—we might add, the saga of Rapunzel in the doorless and windowless tower. Rapunzel draws the prince up to her by her hair, just as the amber-perfumed Rugabe draws the Persian Sal in the poem of Firdusi. Now, the hair, as Mr. Wolfskehl has well explained in a recent paper, is symbolic of the cloud, and there can be no doubt that a prince who temporarily becomes blind and then receives his sight again is intended to represent the sun.

If the sun "drawing water" symbolizes a tower reaching from earth to sky, Nimrod, who pierces the sky by his arrows, erects the tower of Babel. The tower is destroyed, according to a later legend, by the winds. It is not feasible to trace this tower back to the temple of Baal, as many scholars have tried to do, for the tower reaching into the clouds is to be met with quite often. Its destruction by storm occurs also in Mexican folk-lore. It is the destruction of the column of clouds by winds purifying the sky.

Closely akin to the Babylonian saga of Sevechorus is the tale, likewise Babylonian, of Orchamos, who walls up his daughter in a tower because she is loved by the Sun God. According to Ovid, the king Orchamos is distinctly opposed to the ruler of the sun horses. Many a scholar has been at a loss in regard to Orchamos, and until now the puzzle has not been solved. As I am told by a learned acquaintance (Mr. Chait, of Wilna), it seems that the name is identical with another one occurring in the Babylonian Talmud (Pesachim, 119). It is said Jurkami, the prince of hail, had aided the three men in the fiery furnace. Jurkami has a conversation with the angel Gabriel, and he is represented as an important demon. The prince of the hail is a very good analogue of the Tempest God, the enemy of the sun.

IV.

A descendant of the Babylonian saga is a Christian legend the tale of Irene.* A king hides his daughter in a huge tower,

* See Wirth, Danæ in Christlichen Legenden, Wien, 1892.

fearing, as is expressly observed, that the Sun God might damage her. This edifice was erected in the field of Nair.* Through the guarded walls and locked doors there penetrates a heaven-sent man and speaks to the fair maiden and converts her to the Christian faith, an addition, of course, to be charged to the account of the Christian romancist. When the king became aware of the violation of his daughter's seclusion he threw her under the feet of wild horses. This punishment seems to be not uncommon in Persia. It is mentioned also in an epigram of Firdusi. Nair, the castle of Irene, is identical with Navid or Nod, where Cain settles down, and must be traced back to the Nairi mountains, extending between Nisibis and the plain of Babel. The name of the home of Irene is Magedon—*i. e.*, Mygdonia, a country which is likewise in the neighborhood of Nisibis.

It is curious enough that a proper name occurring in the cuneiform many centuries before Christ should be retained until the time of the later Sassanides, in whose epoch the Christian romancist composed the legend.

* Thus the Parisinus græcus, 700.
